

3.2.4. Community based auditing

1. Short description

Management decisions concerning the natural environment can lead to widespread discontent and conflict among stakeholders in the area of interest because of concerns about adverse environmental and social effects. These decisions can be based on a false claim of certainty regarding the scientific background and impacts of the implemented measures. However, citizens who want to raise objections or take part in the decision making procedure face numerous difficulties. Community Based Auditing (CBA) is a tool for empowering citizens to undertake disciplined inquiry into issues relating to natural resource planning and management (Tattersall, 2003). Furthermore, an appropriate manner of dealing with scientific uncertainty is included. CBA is a method of auditing, based in part on internationally recognised standard systems such as ISO 14001.

The CBA audit process occurs on three levels:

1. An audit is performed of the management a proponent intends to use. Auditors, together with their experts, try to unravel the prescriptions and science behind the management plan, including the (risk) assessments which are accomplished in support of the proposed practices. The aim is to examine the validity of the planning assumptions and their application to the case in question.
2. An audit of the site the management plan will be applied to. The aim is to assess the validity and completeness of the application of the management prescriptions. In this stage, data is collected and measurements are made in order to evaluate the soundness claimed by the proponent.
3. Members of the CBA process create a publicly available text of their inquiry. In this publication, the results of the audit process are revealed and they implications of any mismatches of the management plan are shown.

It is important to consider is that the aim of the audit procedure is not only the provision and evaluation of 'hard science', in order to evaluate the proposed management plan and expose any false claims to certainty regarding its scientific background and impacts. The tool also aims to support of the growth and development of participants and facilitators. Figure 15 visualises the interrelations among the components of those two aims. The process guiding participant engagement is known as action research (Reason, 1994).

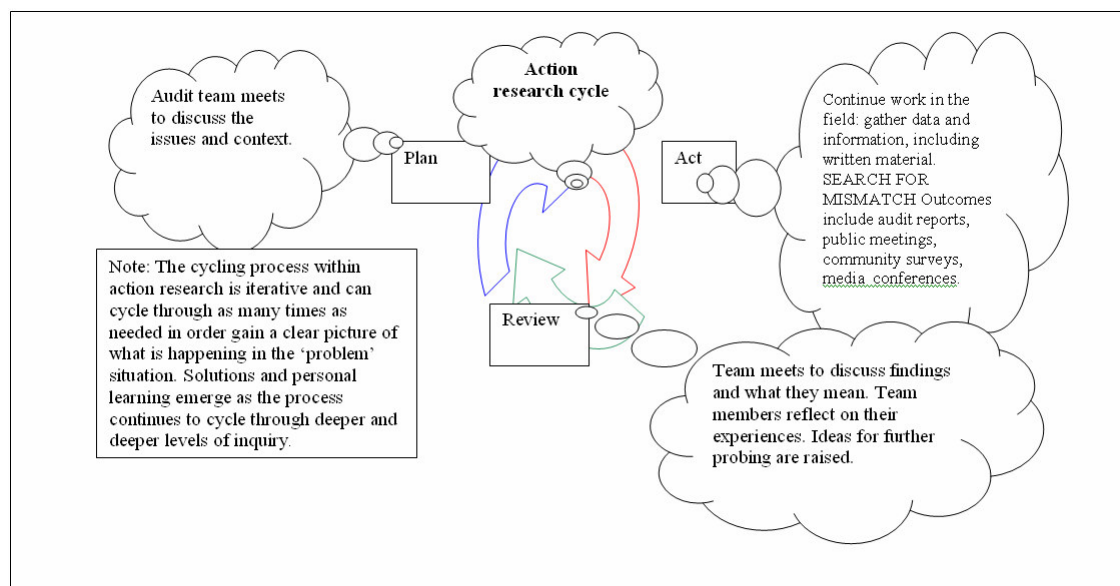


Figure 15. Relationships among the processes within CBA methodology (source: Tattersall, 2007, 2008).

2. How does it take framing into account?

Management plans, advice and decisions are sometimes based on an idea of certainty. They expect and assume that (applied) science ultimately leads to certain and true results. However, citizens who want to object to management plans, often share the same paradigm. CBA approaches the concept of certainty in a different manner, while using the same instruments. Key in CBA is to initiate a process which scrutinises the 'facts', uncertainties, claims, and reasoning behind the management plan. In doing so, this tool uncovers and scrutinizes the (explicit and implicit) frames in the management plan, and the assumptions underlying these. It also helps citizens in making their own frames/perceptions explicit and supporting them with arguments. This could be described as a process of counter-framing. That is, it allows the citizens to create a viable alternative way of sense-making of the decision problem. This creates a more level playing field in the decision making procedure.

3. When and how can it best be used?

This tool can be useful for citizens that are put aside in decision making processes, or have difficulty in motivating their concerns regarding the impact of (natural resource) management plans due to the soundness and certainty claimed by the plans' proponents. CBA provides both for scientific data as well as practical understanding in order to prove the legitimacy of the citizens' concern. In addition, it is inherent to the CBA process to unite a community as a relevant stakeholder in the decision making process.

CBA as a tool can be commenced any moment due to the fact that it is independent of the proponents' actions. However, it is recommended to start a CBA as soon as possible, in order to maximise its influence in the decision making process. It is not necessary to wait until a proponent's management plan and supporting risk assessments are finished, because participants collect their own data, which can be cross-examined with proponents' information at any point. It is recommended that experts are recruited, to play a role as members and mentors during the whole auditing process.

4. More information

Comparable tools:

Fischer, C., Leydesdorff, L., Schophaus, M. (2004). "Science Shops in Europe: The public as stakeholder". *Science and Public Policy*, vol. 31, p. 199-211.

Literature sources:

Reason, P. (1994). "Three approaches to participative inquiry". In: N.K. Denzin, Y. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, p. 324-329.

Tattersall, P.J. (2003). "Community based auditing: empowering the community to take charge – pathways to a just and sustainable society". In: R. Worthington (ed.), *Proceedings of the Community Research Network, 6th Annual Conference, powerful Collaborations: Building a Movement for Social Change*, October 16-19, 2003, Sandstone Minnesota, USA. The Loka Institute, Washington, DC. www.loka.org/conf2003/2003_conference.htm

Tattersall, P.J. (2007). "What is Community Based Auditing and How Does it Work?". *Upper Catchment Issues Tasmania*, (ISSN 1444-9560), vol. 4, no. 2. Tasmanian Community Resource Auditors Inc. <http://www.resource-publications.com.au/uppercachment/>

Tattersall, P.J. (2008) "The Case for a New Form of Community Involvement in Resource Planning and Management In Tasmania". *Upper Catchment Issues Tasmania*, (ISSN 1444-9560), vol. 4, no. 3. Tasmanian Community Resource Auditors Inc. <http://www.resource-publications.com.au/uppercachment/>